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Op Ed -- Opinions and Editorials -- What It's Like to Run for President of ALA When You are the Underdog

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Op Ed — Opinions and Editorials

What It's Like to Run for President of ALA When You are the Underdog

by **Katina Strauch** (Candidate for ALA President) <katina@katina.info> www.katina.info

Okay, y'all. You are my friends. You have been my friends for a long time. I trust you. That is why I feel like I can talk to you.

Yes, I decided to run for **President of ALA**. I initially said no, but then I thought, why not? The profession has changed so very much since I became a professional librarian. There is so much we need to do as a group. We can't sit still and watch our profession be reorganized by people who are not librarians and don't know what librarianship is all about. I thought, why not stand up and be counted, try to make some small thing — anything useful to the profession — happen? I suddenly became invigorated. I didn't feel like I was ready to retire and watch from a back seat anymore. So, I said okay. I would run for President of ALA.

The first phone call I got was from the editor of a prestigious library journal. Supposedly a friend of mine, s/he said, "You aren't going to win, you know. Your opponent (I didn't know who my opponent was til I said I would run. That's the rule.) is a big deal. You are an academic librarian without a base. You aren't even a library director." I didn't say anything. I just listened. So, this is what friends are for? I thought to myself: Okay, so if I lose, it doesn't matter; I will give this my best shot. Try not to embarrass myself or my friends. I started to keep a journal. Every day was either up or down.

Then the phone calls started. Wow, there were phone calls. People wanted me to answer questions, give opinions, be informed on all the issues, and they wanted it all **RIGHT NOW**. As a novice journal editor, I had felt embarrassed asking

people to answer questions in less than a week, but as a candidate for ALA President, I learned that **RIGHT NOW** and **NO LATER THAN TOMORROW** was the standard operating procedure.

Then came the big **ALA Midwinter**. I was expected to have a table staffed by people to give out goodies, trinkets, badges, pins, and t-shirts. This all costs money. Did I mention that ALA does **NOT** support any candidates and even charges them for the use of mailing lists (email and snail mail lists)?

Like I said, I am a regular, grassroots librarian, I do not have a huge staff to ask to staff a table for me. I am just me with my friends, the people who have the money to come to ALA and who have the time to work for me. There are many, many, many, countless of them. They are wonderful people.

ALA Midwinter involved 17 meetings (can you believe it?), different groups of earnest people who wanted my attention (in case) I got elected and might be in a position to do something for their group. It was incredible. All of the people are sincere and hard-working and wonderful.

Don't get me wrong. And I learned a lot about many things that I used to know nothing about.


Then ... da dum ... came the Presidential Candidates Forum at ALA Midwinter on Monday night. **Michael Gorman, Sandy Paul, Becky Lenzini, Jack Montgomery,**

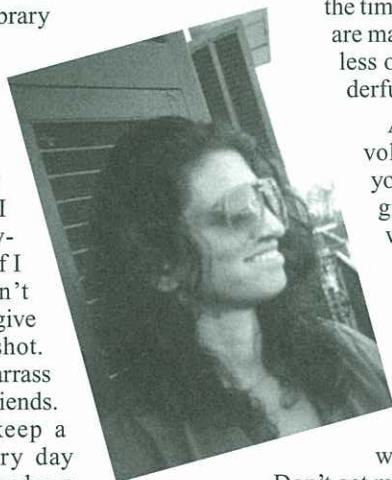
Julia Gelfand, Ward Shaw, Marian Winner, and many, many others were there to cheer me on. I was terrified. Very formal. Five minutes of speaking. Twenty questions with two minutes each to answer. Two minutes to wrap up. Then it was over. Whew! I lived through it and my friends were still talking to me.

It is now nearly four weeks since Midwinter. A lot has happened. Time has not stood still. My acquisitions accounting LTA of 14 years has resigned and I am trying to keep his job going until I can hire a replacement. I have had more questions to answer. There are still more to go. I have started trying to find captains in each state, for each ALA group, for non-ALA groups. There people will try to "get out the vote" in March and April. I have heard a lot of nice things. I have heard a lot of excuses. I have learned a lot about myself.

On April 26, the final ballots will be counted. I will learn whether I won or lost. What will I feel like?

The profession has changed so much and we have so much to do to help the profession find its way in the twenty-first century. Let's do it together. Whether I win or lose. We can do it if we decide to try.

Cheers to you all. And love. Yr. (same ole) editor 



ALA Presidential Election Schedule — Ballot Timeline

March 4, 2002: Ballot mailing begins for 2002 spring election.

March 29, 2002: Ballot mailing completed.

April 26, 2002: Last day ballots are accepted for tabulation.